2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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794 they provide the organized opposition of the Church to the Malta Labour Party.

The most active of these societies are the Catholic Action, the Young Christian Workers, the Legion of Mary and the Sodality of Our Lady. Since the aims of these groups are all very much alike, there is a certain amount of rivalry between them for members and for recognition as the most active society in the parish. The position of Catholic Action as the leading lay apostolate society is being challenged by the Legion of Mary and the Young Christian Workers, whose militant opposition to the Labour Party has generated much publicity.

The Jesuits introduced the Young Christian Workers movement in 1945. Its members today, however, are for the most part young unmarried white-collar workers. This is an occupational class which does not generally support the Labour Party. The male sections of Catholic Action and the Young Christian Workers usually have their own premises, with facilities for table tennis and billiards, and sometimes a bar and library.

In all villages, the Church societies with the greatest membership are those which cater for women and girls. Few of these groups have premises of their own; they usually meet, separately, several times a week in one of the smaller chapels that are to be found in all villages. There the members say prayers and listen to lectures and sermons from their chaplains. They also teach catechism, look after church vestments, visit the sick and in general perform useful work for the parish priest and the clergy. Many village girls are members of one or other of these groups until they get married. For, quite apart from the religious benefits they may derive, they find in them a certain organized companionship, especially after they leave school.

785 794 The strictest and one of the oldest of the lay apostolate groups is the Society of Christian Doctrine. It is more commonly referred to as *tal-muzew* or MUSEUM (Magister Utinam Sequatur Evangelium Universus Mundus). A Maltese priest founded the society in 1907 with the object of giving a deep religious formation to its members through a life of prayer and instruction. Although MUSEUM members live at home and work alongside others, they may not smoke, attend any kind of public entertainment, cultivate friendships with non-members, read secular newspapers or join other associations. Moreover, the men are required to cut their

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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hair short, are not allowed to wear neckties, and must wear jackets in public. Female members are obliged to wear the traditional Maltese *ghonella* (also *faldetta*). This is a black silk cowl which renders the wearer completely shapeless. Finally, all members are tied by a promise of celibacy. Since members usually enter the society as children, and work up through grades until they become full members, this promise ensures that all are either bachelors or spinsters.

The male and female sections are completely separate. Each meets daily under its respective superior in its own house. There the members hold devotional exercises, conduct study groups for adults and also teach catechism to the children. The superiors are normally elected for life; but if the members cannot agree, the national superior general, after consultation with the parish priest, appoints an acting superior, either from the village or from outside groups.

The society is somewhat unusual among village religious associations, since no member of the village clergy is directly involved in its activities, though priests are often invited in to give lectures. This relatively independent status, and the close contact that members maintain with their national headquarters, has led some parish priests to look upon it as a potential threat to their authority and consequently to oppose its establishment in their parishes. Thus, although the society has spread to 40 (83 per cent) of the Maltese parishes, it is only established in 6 (40 per cent) of those in Gozo, Malta's conservative sister island. In point of fact, wherever it has been established it has supported the authority of the parish priest, and its members are now among the staunchest opponents of the Labour Party.

In each parish there are usually several loosely organized groups such as the Association of Christian Mothers and the Holy Name Society which meet infrequently for special prayers and devotions.

Finally, there is at least one confraternity in each parish. A confraternity is a lay religious society which is dedicated to a particular saint and offers Masses for dead members. These societies, called *fratellanzi*, are the oldest associations in Malta, and many date back to the Middle Ages. Formerly certain confraternities in the larger villages and towns acted as trade guilds; others only enrolled persons of the highest socio-economic class. Both men and women may enrol, as members; but only men may wear the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
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repair and improve the statue and its pedestal. The procession also includes a dozen or so masked penitents who walk barefooted or crawl the length of the procession route dragging heavy chains behind them. It is a most solemn and impressive spectacle.

Very early on Easter morning the bells ring out the announcement of the Resurrection, and the sacristan, helped by Anton and Pawlu, removes the black damask from the church walls and sacred pictures. Later in the morning the procession with the statue of the Risen Christ passes through the village.

## II

Of all the village feasts, the most important is always that of the patron saint of the parish church. The patron or titular saint of a church is the saint under whose special protection its founders have placed it. The titular of the parish church thus becomes the patron saint and protector of the village. In addition to the more usual religious ceremonies and processions, the people express their devotion to their patron with band marches and tremendous displays of fireworks. These celebrations provide the chief public entertainment of the countryside.

But the annual festa is more than a superior religious feast and a time of amusement for the village; it is also an event upon which village prestige depends. During the feast thousands of people crowd in from every part of the island. All these visitors have definite ideas on how a good festa should be run, and nothing they see or hear escapes their critical attention. The decoration of the church, the lighting of the streets, the quantity and firing rhythm of the exploding rockets are compared with those of their own and other feasts. The reputation of the village depends upon their judgement. This is a matter which concerns everyone, and the village draws together to display itself to the outsiders in the most favourable light. House fronts are repainted and new clothes are bought or made. The church is illuminated, the interior is hung with red damask and its treasures are placed on display. Every year the village tries to acquire at least one new work of art for this display. The principal streets and the square are lined with vividly painted papier mâché statues of prophets and saints, interspersed with urns from which sprout dazzling branches of electric light. Overhead, scores of colourful arches, strung from

159 434 454 is not encouraged by this situation to invest his capital in any improvement for which no immediate return is apparent. Ġamri has, however, put a large amount of money into pigs and would seem to regard this as a better investment than putting his money into capital equipment for his fields. He has in [407] fact no mechanical equipment, although his brother has a rotary cultivator which Ġamri hires at a reduced rate of 16/- per tomna (instead of £1) for his own holding. No charge is made when the machine is used on the joint holding, in which case Ġamri contributes to the cost of fuel.

* 159 511 262 Expenses within the household are difficult to determine since so much of the food eaten by the family comes from the fields worked by Ġamri and his brother. This includes vegetables, fruit, salads, melons. Tomato paste (kunserva), a common element of diet throughout Malta, is home-made in this case. The two goats and two sheep supply the family with milk; though tinned milk is normally bought in for babies as required. Milk pasteurized by the M.M.U. is not bought. They occasionally buy in a little cheese, but most of this, and all eggs, are produced on the farm. Fish is caught from time to time by Ġamri himself, but some, such as tinned tuna, is bought. Poultry and rabbits for the family table are from the farm stock but some small birds, such as quail, are shot ('hunted') for roasting or stews. A home-made wine is supplemented with purchased soft drinks, notably the ubiquitous "Kinnie". Other items purchased include meat and ham,, coffee, jams, biscuits and luxury confectionery (for special days such as first Communions, Confirmation, etc), olive oil and olives, together with the rationed goods (1958) -butter, bread, sugar and farinaceous paste (għaġin). Ġamri observes that the rationed (subsidized) supplies are usually insufficient for the family so additional quantities of these items have to be bought. In the case of bread, for example, these more costly off-the-ration purchases bring [354] the total weekly bill to some thirteen shillings. The sole means of cooking and heating is paraffin (petrolju), as throughout most of the rural areas of the Islands, and the family spends about 3s 6d weekly on this. Heating is not considered essential even during the coldest part of the winter when the family "close the door" (Ġamri).

* 159 262 [369] The diet of the family is essentially typical of rural Malta. In some details this differs from that found among urban working classes in the Islands but these differences are of emphasis rather than content. Thus the countryman tends to consume potatoes, the produce of his own farm, where the townsman relies for the bulk element of his diet on paste, notably Italian spaghetti and macaroni. An important factor is religion and its fasting and other restrictions. [785] Pasts are of three types (i) the Lenten Fast - "In the old

days people fasted full forty days" (Ġamri); (ii) the Friday Fast - it is forbidden to eat meat on Fridays and preferable to avoid it on Wednesdays also; and (iii) Special Fasts. These include the 'Change of Season' fasts and a variety of Saints' Days, special personal observances and certain occasional fasts designated by the Church authorities. The emphasis is on self-denial in all fasts. Meat, confectionary and 'extra' items are strictly avoided, and the quantity of permitted foods is also reduced. Nothing is eaten between the frugal meals.

The timing of meals throughout the day is variable in Ġamri's family. Rarely does he sit down to table with his wife and children, whose routine has to accommodate school time-tables, etc. On non-fast days breakfast consists of bread and coffee. Lunch is taken about noon - or an hour or so earlier on fast-days. If he is working in the fields Ġamri may have a loaf of bread, with oil, cheese, figs, olives, chickpeas and corn beef or some fish, or some cooked meal may be brought out to him by one of the women or girls. Sweet black coffee or home-made wine are the staple drinks, and the meal is normally followed by a siesta of at least one hour. The time of the evening meal depends on the nature and pressure of work in hand and consists of a stew (especially where the lunch had been a cold meal in the fields). At all times food is used carefully. It is never wasted. Even produce of the farm such as eggs are "only given to the boys occasionally" (Ġamri).

The proportion of food purchased is now much greater than even a generation ago in this type of family. The same is true of clothing. Clothing has changed very considerably both in style and variety since Ġamri's father was a young farmer when half the people in the village had looms and many had spinning wheels to produce cotton garments for the family or other villagers. The old style of dress of the farmer consisted of knee-length, white cotton trousers, a thick woollen vest, waistcoat and cummerbund. The locally produced sheep's wool vest has been largely replaced by army surplus types of shirts. Garments of Maltese cotton and wool are now rarely seen except on the oldest men, who have been wearing them since they were much younger. The use of army surplus clothing has become very common since 1945 and the travelling drapers' vans, local shops and the Sunday markets (Valletta and Rabat) now do a considerable trade in both made up garments and materials of this type.

With the increasing contact between town and country the farmer has come to want smarter suits for his brief leisure hours. The younger generation of countryfolk no longer venture to the capital unless they are dressed like townsmen - suit, tie, shoes and so on. This increase in the

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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those, who, either from the effect of the country walk, or from the smells emanating from the cooked rabbits and fried sausages, feel inclined to go in and partake of the tempting dishes.

The crowd of visitors keep on promenading along the streets of the village till little before sunset. At the *Angelus*, the Zabbar visitors are on their way home, and the inhabitants of the village, are left peacefully alone to remove the chairs and tables prepared for their friends and relations.

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## *HOLY THURSDAY AND GOOD FRIDAY*

These two days of Holy Week—the end of the Penitential season—are days of solemn and melancholy ceremonial in Malta and observed as days of rigid

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
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fast, being sacred as a commemoration of the crucifixion of our Lord.

The Churches are covered with black hangings, all the altars stripped of their ornaments, and all the bells are kept silent in token of deep mourning.

The people assist in crowds at the most imposing services which take place in all the principal churches on these days.

On Holy Thursday (Maundy Thursday), from about 1 p.m. till very late at night, the towns, Notabile and the other thickly populated centres of Malta, present a very striking scene.

Hundreds, from every rank and class of the people, generally in couples or in groups, are seen most devoutly performing the visit to the churches, reciting prayers all the time as they move from one church to another.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6



salt may produce its effects it must be thrown by a married woman, not by a maiden.

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## IL *GHAGIUSA*

We have an old custom in Malta to make children believe that the *ghagiusa* (the oldest woman living in the parish) is killed at noon on Thursday, the middle of Lent.

Mothers, after fasting the first twenty days of lent, send their children to the door of the parish church, or of some convent to see the sexton or some friar throwing the old woman from the steeple down below.

The disappointment of the children is indeed very great when at noon, they don't see the *ghagiusa* thrown down.

8:Brockman T-5 (no date) 1938
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to justify the inconvenience of caring for them is a lesson which had to be learned. "Ghalec ma tridx tmut l'ghagiusa, ghax actar ma ticber izjed titghallem"—"The old woman does not want to die for the older she grows the more she learns"—is a common saying. For further proof that the story of the "Kaukam" has come down from very early times, there is the only other context in which the word *ghagiusa* means "an old woman" or, more accurately, "the oldest woman hereabouts" (normally the word means "a crab").

> "We have an old custom in Malta," says Bussutil,[1] "to make children believe that the ghagiusa is killed at noon on Thursday, the middle of Lent. Mothers, after fasting the first twenty days of Lent, send their children to the door of the parish church, or of some convent to see the sexton or some friar throwing the old woman from the steeple. . . ."

That the destruction of the old woman should occur in the middle of Lent—a period of fasting—is too much of a coincidence not to indicate that, in times when food was scarce, the aged folk were removed—either by being thrown from a high place or, to save the guilt of actual murder, walled up in a rock tomb, as in the case of the peasant. The association of the Church with the destruction of the *ghagiusa* suggests that in primitive times the removal of the aged was the responsibility of the pagan priests who performed the "ritual murders." These murders may have developed from a practical necessity into a sacrificial propitiation.

The story of the Kaukam takes its name from the ancient's first piece of advice to his perplexed son. Faced with the probability of losing his own crops while he cares for those of the Sultan, who has commanded that no man may plant his

[1] GALEA AND MURRAY, op. cit.